

## Shamoka Run Farm

Leo Tammi

Shamoka Run Farm is, in many ways, a typical modest family farm in Augusta County. Judy and I moved here 34 years ago. I was raised on a small diversified farm with one or two milk cows, hogs, sheep and mostly poultry. (An immigrant peasant's dream)

Early on, I learned to farm the land for what it is best suited. These steep and rocky soils are best suited for forage production.

We raise about 500 Polypay ewes on 300 acres of owned and rented land. Polypays are distinctive for their strong maternal characteristics. About 240 acres are hay and pasture. We raise replacement ewes. We sacrifice market lamb characteristics as we select for criteria that produces a brood ewe--moderate size, prolificacy, fertility, milking ability, hardiness. Ours is a forage passed system. We expect our ewes and lambs to perform on pasture. So, much of our management emphasizes forage production. Our ewes with newborn lambs go out on pasture with high quality forage. We produce many of our own replacements, including rams. On the occasion that we introduce another ram, it would need to come from another forage based production system. We sell most of our sheep (except culls) and lambs as private treaty.

Sheep do not require large capital expenditure for facilities. Our handling facility is simply a chute and cutting gate. Our primary working barn is a pole barn. It is a multi-use facility as we assemble and disassemble structures as the seasons demand. As the hay comes out we set up lambing jugs and use that space for lambing. We replace a number of solid panels in the working chute with swinging door panels to create a facility for shearing.

If you want to test your animal husbandry skills--raise sheep. Animal health concerns are a major test. We vaccinate for the major claustridial diseases especially enterotoxemia C and D and tetanus. Controlling internal parasites is our major constraint. I have been floating fecal samples for 25 years and have watched as all the anthelmintic classes have lost their efficacy. I used to think if an animal was sick, you should give medicine. That logic has gone a long way to creating the terrible situation we are in now. We worm strategically, at lambing and weaning. Beyond that, we try to worm only when needed increasing refugia in the pasture.

I have long preached production efficiency of forages. We stockpile forages for winter and summer grazing. Brassicas are a great alternative in the winter. Now we manage our forages with the production efficiency goal of keeping our animals alive. We leave much more residue, longer periods between grazing and try to create "safe pasture". Multi species grazing has worked well for us in the past. We are also looking at using alternative forages that suppress

parasitism such as lespedeza. For several years we have been working native grasses into the program.

Predators, including internal parasites, are our major production constraint.

I have to say this: The infrastructure of the sheep industry is failing. We are at risk of becoming a cottage industry. Lamb may be the most popular meat in the world, but our consumption is less than a pound per capita per year. We are a small segment in a monstrously large meat industry. We are neglected by the pharmaceutical industry. Other nations are using products, especially anthelmintics, that we can't get. That has market implications.

Nationally, the lamb market is dominated by fewer yet larger buyers. We in the East, however are well positioned to survive much market turmoil as we target direct marketing and the ethnic market. Best case? Our ability to grow grass in Virginia and the Southeast can give us advantages. If we can solve the parasite problem.